Finding a Lost Pet

There are few things more frightening than discovering your pet is missing, but the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria is here to help. Time is of the essence, so read through our suggestions to see where you can get started.

Check Our Stray Animal Listings

Our staff post information about stray animals we find or hear about here. If your animal is on this list, or if you have information about any of the lost animals you see, please call us right away at 703-746-4774.

Report Lost Pets to the AWLA

Call the AWLA and other area shelters to report your pet as missing. Staff will take a description of your pet, check it against a list of stray animals at our shelter and enter your animal into our system. Lost pets remain on our list of stray pets for up to ten days. Lost animals arrive throughout the day and our description of found animals may not exactly match yours, so please provide as much detail as possible.

To call about a lost pet: 703-746-4774

Search Your House and Yard

Common hiding places include:
- Appliances (clothes dryer, washing machine, refrigerator, etc.)
- Attic and crawl spaces
- Boxes and large containers
- Cabinets (including file cabinets)
- Drain pipes and gutters
- Drawers, shelves, bookcases
- Roof
- Sheds and barns
- Trees and bushes
- Vehicles (including inside the engine during cold weather, for cats)

**Walk Your Neighborhood**

- **Go door-to-door** where your pet was last seen, talking to everyone.
- Carry a written description or **flyer of your pet** with your phone number to leave with residents or on the door (for your safety, never leave your name or your address).
- Bring a powerful **flashlight** even during the day. You will be looking in dark spaces such as garages, trash bins and crawl spaces. If injured, your dog or cat is likely to hide in a dark space and may be too frightened to respond to your voice.
- Frequently **call to your pet**. S/he can hear you from great distances. Stop often and listen for a reply or other animal noises.
- Bring your pet’s favorite squeaky toy and use it. Take a box of your pet’s favorite treats and rattle it loudly while calling his/her name.
- **Post simple, clear flyers** around the neighborhood. Pets may roam more than a mile away. Include a short description of your pet (i.e. male cat, black fur, green eyes), but withhold several identifying marks so you can verify that a person truly has your pet. If possible, include a color photo of your pet. **Never** put your name or your address on the flyer.

Your pet’s **sense of smell** can help him find his way. Outside your home, place familiar, strongly-scented items such as

- A pair of your old gym socks or shirt.
- Your pet’s bedding and/or favorite toys.
- Foods such as tuna, sardines or other savory meat.
Outside Your Neighborhood

- **Call and visit other shelters** in the area. Found animals are not always taken to the shelter in the jurisdiction where they are found. Sometimes Good Samaritans don’t know where the shelter is and will instead bring animals to a nearby jurisdiction. Shelters are required to hold stray animals for a “stray period,” so it is very important to contact area shelters right away if your pet is lost. Animals without an indication of ownership (collar, microchip, etc.) must be held for at least 5 days. Those that do have a collar or other indicators of ownership are held for an additional 5 days. Click on the following names for the website homepages of shelters in neighboring jurisdictions: Animal Welfare League of Arlington, Fairfax County Animal Control, Washington Humane Society, Loudoun County Animal Care and Control, Prince George’s County Animal Management Group.

- **Call local veterinary offices/emergency clinics**, and visit the office if they have an animal that sounds even remotely like your pet.
- Register your lost pet with Petfinder: www.petfinder.com
- Check the “Lost and Found” section on Craig’s List: www.craigslist.com. The AWLA posts all of our stray animals here during their stray period.
- **Run a “lost pet” ad** in the newspaper and community publications. Search the “found” section of these publications as well.
- Check with your local and state Department of Transportation (DOT). Both local and state DOTs can help you determine if they have picked up the body of your pet. In the City of Alexandria, these animals are picked up by animal control officers and brought to the shelter to try to match them with descriptions of lost animals.

If We Have Your Lost Pet

Come to the Vola Lawson Animal Shelter and **bring the following items**:

**Proof of ownership**

The **law requires** that shelters verify ownership before releasing a pet. Acceptable items include
- Vet records in your name with your pet’s description.
- Photos of your pet over time.
- Microchip or tattoo records.
- Bill of sale or adoption contract with your pet’s description.

Please also bring the following:

- **Collar and leash** for dogs and collar and carrier for cats and other animals. We will not release any animal that is not properly restrained. These items can be purchased for a modest fee at the shelter.
- **ID tag.** You can purchase this at the shelter or at pet supply stores.
- Cash or credit card to pay **redemption fees**.
- A boarding fee of $17/night is charged for each night the animal stays at the shelter.
- If Animal Services picked up your pet, there is a $10 **impound fee** for the first time your pet has been picked up. This fine increases with subsequent impounds.
- An additional fee of $50 is charged for the **vaccinations** and care given to each animal upon their arrival at the shelter.
- **City dog/cat license.** If you live in the City of Alexandria and your pet does not have a current cat or dog license, you will be asked to purchase that license. If your pet has a current rabies vaccination, you will purchase the license that day. Otherwise, you must go get the vaccine and return within a week to purchase the license.
- Vet bill, if applicable. If your pet required veterinary attention while in our care, we ask that you reimburse the AWLA for these charges.

**Other Questions?**

Please call the AWLA at **703-746-4774** to report a missing pet, or with other questions.